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DEVAL L. PATRICK
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Media Contact

Heather Johnson
Alec Loftus
617-725-4025

Jennifer Kritz (HHS)
617-573-1612

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PATRICK-MURRAY ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES FREE PROGRAM TO HELP VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES QUIT SMOKING

Smoking rate among veterans remains higher than the state average

BOSTON - March 7, 2011 - The Patrick-Murray Administration today launched its second, free statewide smoking cessation program designed to help Massachusetts veterans and their families live healthier and longer lives. Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray joined Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) Secretary Coleman Nee and Department of Public Health (DPH) Commissioner John Auerbach at the New England Center for Homeless Veterans in Boston to announce the inter-agency partnership.

"We value the brave men and women who have proudly served our country and we want to provide them with the opportunity to live long, healthy lives," said Lieutenant Governor Murray, Chair of the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services. "I am proud that Massachusetts is once again providing support to our veterans and their families in their battle to quit smoking."

Massachusetts veterans and their family members can now call the Massachusetts Smokers Helpline at 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669) or go to www.makesmokinghistory.org/veterans to receive free telephone support and a two-week supply of nicotine patches to help them quit smoking.

In 2008, DVS and DPH partnered to launch its first smoking cessation program for veterans. Nearly 4,000 veterans and family members called the Massachusetts Smokers' Helpline to obtain free support and nicotine patches over the course of the seven month program.

"Our veterans and their families have sacrificed so much on behalf of the Commonwealth and our country, and the Patrick-Murray Administration is committed to supporting them in their efforts to live healthier lives," said Secretary Nee. "Services like free phone counseling and nicotine patches will help them in their efforts to eliminate smoking from their lives."

"Smoking is a major factor in many chronic diseases," said Commissioner Auerbach. "This promotion gives our veterans tools to help them quit smoking for good, helping them live healthier, longer lives."

The smoking rate among Veterans remains higher than the state average, even as Massachusetts' overall smoking rate continues to decline. The age-adjusted smoking rate for Massachusetts veterans is 23.5 percent, well over the average for all Massachusetts adults. A recent study from the Institute of Medicine showed that 32 percent of active-duty military personnel smoke, and that the prevalence of smoking may be over 50 percent higher in military personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan than for those who were not deployed there.

Smoking remains the number one cause of preventable death and disease in the Commonwealth, accounting for over \$4.3 billion in health care costs annually. Studies have shown that using products like the nicotine patch to help quit smoking can double the chance of quitting successfully. Using medication and support together makes it three times as likely that a smoker will be able to quit for good.

"This smoking-cessation program for veterans is a demonstration of our state's commitment to helping serve those who have served us," said Representative James E. Vallee, House Chairman of the Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs. "Quitting smoking is a significant step toward a healthy, productive lifestyle, and I encourage our veterans to take advantage of this opportunity to make that positive change in their lives."

The Department of Veterans' Services is committed to spreading the word about the free nicotine patch program and will engage local Veterans' Service Officers, Veteran Service Organizations, Veterans' Outreach Centers, VA hospitals and affiliated clinics, and National Guard facilities to raise awareness about the initiative.

Veterans and their families are encouraged to learn more about the program by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or visiting www.makesmokinghistory.com/veterans.

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